DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 414 150 RC 021 303

TITLE	Effective Rural Schools: A Model for Rural School Improvement.
INSTITUTION	Southwest Region Schools, Dillingham, AK.
PUB DATE	1996-11-00
NOTE	3p.; Printed on colored paper.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Block Scheduling; Educational Change; *High Schools; *Integrated Curriculum; *Rural Schools; *School Restructuring; *School Schedules; Secondary School Curriculum; Small Schools; Team Teaching; Trimester System
IDENTIFIERS	*Southwest Region School District AK

ABSTRACT

An Effective Rural Schools delivery model for small rural high schools was developed by teachers, parents, community members, and principals in a southwestern Alaska district. The model aimed to replace the typical "bush" high school model with effective resource management and delivery strategies that would work in small high schools. The school year was restructured into three 12-week trimesters, each divided into 1-week and 11-week periods. During the 1-week period, students receive intensive instruction from specialized teachers in such areas as child development, cultural activities, study skills, career planning, and goal setting. On-the-job training is also provided. During the 11-week period of each trimester, students are taught core courses in math and language arts by site-based teachers and content courses other than math and language arts by itinerant subject-certified teachers. The content courses are offered in 135-minute blocks; students are given a choice among at least 2 content strands. Goals, objectives, projects, activities, and assessments are identified and integrated through team teaching and collaboration between core and content teachers. (SAS)

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Effective Rural Schools

A Model for Rural School Improvement

ED 414 150

The Southwest Region School District Board of Education and the District staff have committed to providing the additional resources necessary to initiate and sustain a comprehensive effort in high school improvement. The goal of this improvement effort is to provide effective and equitable high school programs to all small rural high schools.

Working with the communities and parents, the Board of Education has committed to a restructuring of our high school programs and delivery model. The restructuring effort, as it was implemented, was not intended to be superficial nor cosmetic. On the contrary, the District knew that to accomplish the changes necessary, and to provide quality programs across the District, there had to be systemic change.

An important beginning to our improvement effort was the acceptance of the premise that our existing village high schools were not producing the desired results. Our schools were not getting the job done. Based upon this premise, we were determined to break out of existing paradigms, and move away from practices that we found to be ineffective or limiting to student success. Knowing that our students are as capable as students anywhere, and knowing that our teachers are as capable as teachers anywhere, the District committed to providing a high quality education through the development of a new delivery model. This development process included teachers, parents, community members, principals, and district staff. The resulting model, identified as the Effective Rural Schools (ERS) model, was piloted in three of the District high schools during the FY'95 school year. That piloting began what was anticipated to be a two to three year restructuring effort. As of FY96, all Southwest Region high schools are implementing the ERS model.

The ERS model was developed by first identifying the needs of students and communities, and then building a resource management and educational delivery model that would work in small rural high schools. We began with an understanding that we wanted quality, academically challenging high school courses available to all students, and that we wanted those courses taught by teachers qualified to teach the subject areas. To do this, we were confident that we would need to discard the typical "bush" high school delivery model. We knew that we could not provide the quality of instruction desired with a model that required the use of two or three teachers, all functioning as generalists, and almost certainly teaching out of their certification areas. Also knowing that current research supports the use of application based, relevant, and integrated curriculum, we developed the ERS model to facilitate and enhance the use of those proven practices.

An important element of ERS is the restructuring of the school year. Instead of semesters or full year orientation, the school year is made up of three, twelve week trimesters. Each trimester is divided into two distinct periods. Each trimester begins with a one week instructional period (an intensive week) followed by an eleven week instructional period. (see Table A)

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Table A:

>School Year<					
1st Trimester		2nd Trimester		3rd Trimester	
1 week	11 weeks	1 week	11 weeks	1 week	11 weeks

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During each intensive week, students are involved in specialized classes and/or projects. Students work in these classes for six hours each day, for five days. Specialized project classes and activities are offered during this period. Specialized classes may include EMT training, child development, cultural activities, study skills, career planning and goal setting, vocational special projects, etc. Also during intensive weeks, students are able to choose from a variety of On-The-Job Training opportunities. A program of career exploration and planning is provided to each student. This program includes opportunities to experience jobs; first in their village, then in the region, and then in a Statewide perspective taking advantage of such programs as RSVP.

During the eleven week period, instruction follows a more traditional curricula, but not necessarily in the traditional style of delivery. During the eleven week periods, the school day is structured more uniquely. Each school is structured around "core" math and language arts programs. These core programs are integrated with content classes. Content classes are subjects other than language arts and math, and are offered in 135 minute blocks. The ERS model calls for each school to have at least two strands available to students. The content areas will determine which strand a student may choose. (see Table B)

Table B:

>School Day<				
Math	Language Arts	Elective	Lunch	Block Class
Math Concepts / Content Applied Math	Content Applied Language Arts	Electives		Content Block Class (i.e., chemistry)
Language Arts	Math	Elective	Lunch	Block Class
Content Applied Language Arts	Math Concepts / Content Applied Math	Electives		Content Block Class (i.e., computer science)

Each high school has a language arts teacher and a math teacher assigned as "core" teachers. During each specific trimester, the school also has two "content area" teachers assigned. While the core teachers remain based at the site for the entire school year, the content teachers move from site to site, by trimester. The movement of the content area teachers is determined by the courses to be offered at each site. The intent of this portion of the design is to provide all students with instruction by teachers certified in the subjects being taught. All students receive language arts and math instruction from the core teachers for the entire year. Rotating by trimester, students receive content area instruction from teachers certified in specific subject areas. Currently, content area teachers are staffed in life sciences, physical sciences, business education, industrial education, health, fine arts, social studies, and Alaska/Pacific rim studies.

Southwest Regions ERS design also assists in implementing an inter-curricular, or a thematic model of instruction. The content application of language arts and math are based upon the content subject being taken by the particular student each trimester. To support this approach the model calls for collaboration between the core and content teachers. In the mornings, the content area teachers serve as support teachers to the math and language arts teachers. In the afternoons, the math and language arts teachers serve as support teachers for content area teachers. By teaming the teachers, we believe that a naturally integrated/applied form of instruction is supported.

The one week/eleven week design of the trimester model helps to facilitate teacher collaboration. During the one week period, the students are receiving intensive course instruction from specialized instructors and not the core or content teachers. The core and content teachers will begin each trimester with five planning days. During this planning week, working in strand teams, the core and content teachers plan the following eleven weeks of instruction. Goals, objectives, projects, activities, assessments, etc. are identified, integrated, scheduled, and prepared. While this team planning is being completed, instructors such as counselors, itinerant teachers, and visiting instructors are working with the students.

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